

Social Capital, Conflict, and Agricultural Extension

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Abstract

Social capital is a relatively new and somewhat nebulous concept, which can be contrasted with financial capital and human capital. Definition issues are discussed. Trust, networking, and reciprocity are key elements. Social capital can result in nonmonetary rewards such as living harmoniously with neighbors. And where the goal is poverty alleviation, enhanced social capital can translate into economic outcomes, for example, by reducing the costs of conducting day-to-day affairs and business and facilitating the spread of knowledge and innovation. In conflict situations, such as what prevails in parts of Mindanao, the isolation of farmers from markets and from sources of advice and finance has surely been a factor inhibiting productivity as verified via farmer survey. A new agricultural extension model called LIFE, i.e., the Livelihood Improvement through Facilitated Extension, builds on social capital (and Landcare) principles in targeting livelihood improvement via agricultural extension in conflict areas. The particular features of the extension model are explained. Simultaneously with developing the LIFE model, empirical research confirmed the relationship between social capital and economic well being. A comprehensive and multidimensional assessment of the impacts arising from the LIFE model application in two pilot test locations in conflict-vulnerable areas of Southern Mindanao was undertaken. That assessment showed considerable gains being made in four dimensions: economic, social, knowledge and skills, and environmental. The LIFE model is proving to be a sound financial investment. With the impending move towards autonomy in some conflict-affected areas of Mindanao, significant development assistance money for smallholders is likely to be forthcoming. LIFE showcases the potential for promoting livelihoods in these areas.